REPRESENTATIVE FOR
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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ACTION REQUIRED TO IMPROVE SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN/YOUTH WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

VICTORIA - Vulnerable children and youth with special needs and their families and caregivers need a more responsive and accountable system of supports, said BC's Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond.

This was among the conclusions reached in a Monitoring Brief released today, designed to focus on the responsiveness and effectiveness of a particular aspect of the child and youth serving system. This brief focuses on services provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Community Living BC (CLBC) who have shared responsibility for delivering services to children and youth with special needs since 2005.

"My goal is supporting MCFD and CLBC in building the strongest and most effective system of support for children with special needs," said Turpel-Lafond. "Families, care providers and front line staff tell us the current system is too complex, not accountable and doesn't help all children and youth who need support."

The key concerns identified in the brief included:

- service delivery system is complex and fragmented;
- lack of support for families/caregivers who require or want help planning for, implementing or coordinating services/supports available to them;
- wait times - from assessments to intervention services - are problematic;
- eligibility criteria inappropriately precludes some children and youth from some services;
- confusion around the roles and responsibilities between the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Community Living BC (CLBC) when there is a need for an out-of-home placement;
- limited data on services for children and youth with special needs and an inability to assess whether services have been effective. It is not possible to know who is getting what service(s) by whom, and with what outcome.

Turpel-Lafond added eligibility criteria that restricts access to some services to children and youth based on a formal diagnosis of mental retardation and an IQ of 70 or lower, excludes many children whose ability is severely impaired.

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"We know many children and youth with special needs are being left with little or no support based on as few as three IQ points," said Turpel-Lafond. "It is time for a child-centred approach to eligibility for these critical services."

She added to better support youth with special needs transitioning to the adult system, she would like to see the age limit for services provided through MCFD and CLBC increased from 19 to 24 years.

"A prudent parent would not send a 19 year old with developmental disabilities out to fend for him/herself when they know that the young person is unable to independently seek help or care," said Turpel-Lafond.

The brief sets out short and long-term recommended outcomes to ensure:

- family and caregivers can readily understand and navigate the system;
- eligibility for child and youth services is child-centred and needs-based;
- services to children and youth with special needs serves children and youth from birth to age 24;
- Aboriginal children and youth have access to the same range of services as other children;
- services for children and youth with special needs have a strong quality assurance process; and
- public accountability and reporting include number of children served, how they are served, at what cost and with what outcome.

Turpel-Lafond said she will continue to examine issues relating to the health and wellbeing of children and youth with special needs in keeping with her mandate to monitor the effectiveness of the child serving system.

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